

# Whack-a-Mole

## Whack-a-Mole: The Sausalito Housing Edition 02/04/2025

Ah, Whack-a-Mole—the fabulous arcade game where no matter how hard you hit those pesky critters, they just keep popping back up. And just like at the county fair, Sausalito's version of the game is rigged. But instead of plastic moles, we have housing proposals. Every time a solution gets hammered down, another problem jumps up, faster and sneakier than before. Confused? Frustrated? That's the point. Welcome to Sausalito's very own bureaucratic funhouse!

### Game Creators

Meet our master architects of confusion: The City Council, their committees, and City Staff. They have an all-star legal team—four separate law firms!—who work tirelessly to make sure residents remain dazed and exhausted. But how much do these legal whizzes cost? That's classified, of course! (Hint: it's believed to be around a million dollars annually—because who needs paved roads when you can have lawsuits?)

But wait, there's more! Enter the consultants. DeNovo has already pocketed over a cool **\$1,015,251**, Opticos grabbed **\$147,370**, and Robert Brown (ODDS) strolled away with **\$95,215**—and that number is still climbing! Check the City Council's consent calendar for the next round of baffling payments. Meanwhile, two of our esteemed Planning Staff members, **Kristin Teiche and Neil Toft**, enjoy the rare privilege of **double-dipping**—collecting full pensions while also being paid high hourly rates. If only the rest of us could get in on that deal! One would think, that with all the new staff pay raises, Sausalito would be able to open the City Planning offices more than two days a week, between 9-12. Pleading poverty, the City Council denied monies to the good people of Sausalito Beautiful, to replace two dead trees downtown. They were left to beg residents for \$40,000 in donations to make Sausalito Beautiful.

### Game Players & Mole Whackers

#### The Hill (a.k.a. the Ultimate NIMBYs)

These are the VIP players—well-funded, well-lawyered, and committed to ensuring that housing never happens or happens *somewhere else, as in the North part of town*. They hire architects, “environmentalists,” and other professionals who, with a firm handshake while swearing on a stack of crisp hundred-dollar bills, create “true” reports that conveniently align with their cause. But you don't need to live in this part of town to be part of the club, some City Council members even hold **exclusive Club memberships**.

#### Marinship (The Silent Guardians of Industrial Land)

They have 225 acres and the ultimate power-up: **Ordinance 1022**, which has kept housing out of the Marinship for 40 years. They feel untouchable, but their infrastructure is crumbling. Who

will pay to fix it? That's right—**the rest of Sausalito**. Could new housing in the Marinship help pay the bills? Sure! But don't expect anyone to suggest that; at least not on a property that would actually get built. The Game Creators have hand-picked properties that will never be developed in the Marinship and have ignored property owners that have offered their land for development. They think HCD won't notice....

### **MLK Neighborhood (Unexpected Contenders)**

Historically quiet, this group is now making noise. Their mission: to protect the largest green area in town and keep an affordable housing project away from their children's schoolyard. Ironically, the very "Fair Housing" distribution laws the city claims to honor; are really not being honored, with the bulk of the proposed housing units identified to go to the north end of town, like at MLK.

### **Developers (Waiting in the Wings)**

These folks are game players, but only for their own projects. If they ever coordinated, they'd be a powerhouse. But for now, many are sitting back, waiting for Sausalito to drive itself into **Builder's Remedy**—a free pass for developers when cities fail to meet housing mandates.

### **The Just Say No Club**

They have one move: **"No."** Every. Single. Time. If this passionate, older demographic ever redirected their energy toward a positive cause—like senior housing—they could actually secure a **forever home** for many of their own. But alas, "No" is the game they play best.

### **Old Town (The Silent Observers)**

This group is staying as quiet as possible, hoping no one notices that the Housing Element conveniently skipped their part of town. Shhh! Maybe HCD won't notice either.

### **HCD (The State's Watchdogs)**

These are the referees and enforcers; the watch dogs, enforcing fairness in housing development. They are backed by their own attorneys and the Department of Justice. Sausalito, however, has an **"Affected City"** status due to past noncompliance with housing. Translation: we're under extra scrutiny and have additional laws that apply here. Our track record? In **10 years**, the city has approved exactly **zero** projects with **three or more units**. For larger projects, over 10 units, it's **been over 60 years since there were any approvals**. In 2023, we achieved a whopping **1% of our housing approval requirements**. (Slow clap.)

### **Positive People (The New Kids on the Block)**

These newcomers believe in a radical idea: that residents should actually **enjoy living here**—not just pay taxes while dodging tourists. They believe that the town should not be stuck in the past. What a concept!

## PBID (The Rising Business Force)

Since most business owners aren't residents, they've been told they have no say in city decisions. But with half the city's budget coming from business and hotel taxes, this group isn't staying quiet. They're in their infancy now—but **just wait**.

## Let the Games Begin!

With so many players, so many hidden agendas, and so much money flying around, Sausalito's housing game is more entertaining than any carnival attraction. But while the whack-a-mole chaos rages on, one thing is clear: **change is coming, whether the players like it or not**. The question is—who will actually win?

Grab your mallet. It's time to play.

**EIR-** California Cities are required to create an EIR for every new Housing Element, which analyzes the potential environmental impacts of the new housing development projects.

**Mole #1-** EIR #1 was created for the General Plan, certified 2/10/2021. Sausalito decided that they did not need to create a new one for the Housing Element.

*“Council determined that the action **“was exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act under general rule of CEQA guidelines, in that there is no possibility that the Housing Element may have a significant negative physical impact on the environment”**. (Staff Report 1/21/2025)*

The result of the action, to not formally adopt, certify and submit an EIR to the State of California, for the housing element, has resulted in a very expensive CEQA violation lawsuit, by YIMBY, which is still in progress. Litigation costs, Shhh... are classified, but are believed to be close to a million dollars, and will climb with a court date coming soon. If Sausalito does not prevail in this ongoing lawsuit; it could cost Sausalito additional millions of dollars in attorney fees, state penalties, payment of opposing attorney fees, loss of funding from the State of California and **Builders Remedy**- which will result in loss of control of the building approval processes for development, in our City.

**Mole #2-** The second EIR, was created for the 6<sup>th</sup> Cycle Housing Element, City Council stating **“The City of Sausalito, as lead agency has determined that the Sausalito Housing Element (proposed project) will require a preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR)”**. The City first posted a Notice of Preparation on December 2022 and closed Public comment on January 2024. However, the City never officially “adopted or certified” this extensive, publicly viewed, commented on and thought approved EIR. Neither was this EIR or any EIR ever submitted to the State of California, as required by law. Instead, the City Council launched Mole #3 with the comment.....

**Mole #3-** *“Council voiced a variety of comments and concerns regarding the scale of development on identified housing opportunity sites. In particular, the comments suggested that the densities and height limits on housing opportunity sites in the Historic Downtown (District) and along the waterfront locations be reduced to better maintain the character of those areas and avoid conflicts with surrounding properties.”*(staff report 1/21/2025) *“Subsequently, the City directed De Novo Planning Group to shift their efforts to preparing”* the Amended EIR and Housing Element which *“reduces some densities in some sites, while increasing development potential in others.”* (staff report 1/21/2025) Weighing in at 664 pages, De Novo has shown very competent- cutting and pasting skills- from any EIR ever written.

**This launched a flotilla of Moles!** Suddenly it did not matter if you wrote a letter stating that you were not interested in having your property named as a Housing Opportunity site (1 and 3 Harbor Drive). That just means you win an upgrade to 129 base housing units! MLK became the new the target for high density, the polluted Spencer Fire House rises from the dead, and at the top of the list City Hall reappears. Sneaking in, with no mapping and no detail other than “not in the Historic District”, was the newly added, listed National Historic site, the Alta Mira Hotel; which may carry the highest property density of all.

**Anger arises, and we arrive at the “Moles Behind the Curtain” part of the game.** City Council proposes **“Choose Any Mole behind the Curtain”**. However, if you fell asleep during the riveting De Novo housing presentations, and didn’t memorize housing site numbers, you lose...

**Mole #1A “Behind the Curtain”** This is a confusing mole. No rezoning, only Builders Remedy.

**Mole #1B “Behind the Curtain”** No change to the Approved Housing element, no Drama. (Sausalito, no drama? Really?)

**Mole #2 “Behind the Curtain”** Proposes eliminating sites due to poor emergency evacuation routes or steep slopes. However, the sites that are eliminated are actually located along the main transportation corridor, Bridgeway. Even HCD would wake up and notice that!

**Mole #3 “Behind the Curtain-** Doubles down on increasing density in the North part of town. If you can’t see housing from our backyards in “The Hill”; it must be a good choice.

**Mole #4 “Behind the Curtain”** Elimination of Historic sites but adds site 202 which is described as “not being located in the Historic District”. But fails to mention that Site 202 is a listed National Historic property. To make up for the loss of other neighboring sites, the Alta Mira gets the Golden Ticket of 70 units per acre zoning, which would allow approximately 140 units to be built on site, with no parking requirement.

**Mole #5 “Behind the Curtain”** This Mole speeds up and increases the pace of, The Game of Deflection, by adding three additional moles.

**Mole #5, Scenario #1** MLK density changes from 94 to 84 base units.

**Mole #5, Scenario #2** MLK density changes from 94 to 50 base units.

**Mole #5, Scenario #3** MLK, the school *Untouched*. MLK The park *Spared*. A victory for reasonable minds! But wait—now, logic is shoved aside, and in its place? ***Fear***.

The City now declares: *“These are your only options for that trade.”*

- **Alta Mira?** *Stack ‘em up, add more density!*
- **The Spencer Fire Station?** *Sure?*
- **City Hall?** *Why not, let’s throw it back in!*

Come on now! We all know there are better options. This isn’t urban planning—it’s a **hostage negotiation!** Instead of working together to find real, community-based solutions, we’re being told to choose between the least-bad scenarios, as if no better alternatives exist.

**Long, long ago—October, 2022, to be exact—when cooler minds prevailed. A time of innocence, before the battle lines were drawn, before factions arose to valiantly fight against the horror of housing anywhere near their backyard. These were the responses from the Sausalito Community Housing Poll-**

In order to accommodate and increase the number of units allowed, which of the following areas do you most prefer for increasing capacity of housing for:

- Low to very low units- #1 Mixed Use**
- Moderate Units- #1 Mixed Use**
- Above Moderate- #1 Condominium**

In order to accommodate additional units, it is anticipated that the City of Sausalito will need to increase the number of units allowed on various sites in Sausalito. Which of the following methods do you most prefer increasing the capacity for housing?

**#1- 86.61%- Conversion of select parcels with commercial, office and/or industrial uses to mixed use**

Which actions should Sausalito prioritize during the 2023-2031 Housing element

**#1- Developing housing along transit/bus lines**

How important are the following housing priorities to you and your family?

**#1-Promote sustainable, efficient and fire-safe housing to address safety, energy and climate change impacts**

**#2- Sustainable, walkable development (housing within walking distance to services, schools, and/or the downtown**

What are Sausalito’s Housing Challenges and constraints?

**#1- 94% of Sausalito’s workforce has to commute here**

What are Sausalito’s Fair Housing issues and concerns?

**#1- Don’t put all the new housing in the north part of town**

It has been almost magical, the way people discovered new reasons to oppose the very thing they once championed. The enthusiasm remained—but now it was for crafting ever more creative objections.

But here's the truth: Sausalito is at a crossroads. We either embrace well-planned housing solutions, or we resign ourselves to becoming an old run-down museum—admired, but empty. The town's coffers are becoming empty. The goose is laying less Golden Eggs; downtown businesses are suffering. The choice isn't between housing *or* preserving our town's character; it's about **housing *to* preserve our town's character.**

Our community thrives better *together*. Not just in theory, but in reality. Because if we don't, history will look back at *this* moment and say: "*Long, long ago, in February 2025, when we had the chance to do the right thing... but chose not to.*"

Thank you for indulging me to bring a little levity and transparency to our very serious conversations.

Linda Fotsch

Resident and Mole Slayer